

NEW CHAPTER FOR SCHOOL

Alden Library to offer comfort, space

By John Chaffee
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DUXBURY — From the outside, the former red-brick upper Alden school looks almost unchanged.

But inside it's empty.

Over the next eight months it will be transformed into the town's new public library, providing three times the space of the current library and such amenities as a cafe, an automatic teller machine and a lounge where children can call home free and wait for their parents to pick them up.

"We're modeling it on what successful bookstores are doing," library director Joanne Lamothe said.

A recent tour of the one-time high school building with Lamothe and project director Debbie Bornheimer required a lot of imagination to visualize not only what it once was but what it's going to be.

There will be two entrances, said Bornheimer, who is overseeing the \$6.3 million project.

The main entrance, she said, will be at what used to be the rear of the building when it was a school, opposite the public tennis courts on Alden Street. That's where there will be a 100-car parking lot and easy access to the basement cafe, a 120-seat meeting room and the elevator to the two floors above.

Upstairs, the former main entrance to the school will be known as the "campus entrance," Bornheimer said, because it overlooks playing fields, three schools, the present library and the Percy Walker Pool.

"That's for the kids who walk over from school or for people who are being left off or

Duxbury

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— Debbie Bornheimer,
project director

picked up," Bornheimer said.

Planning began in 1986, she said, and at first a consultant recommended expanding the existing library.

But when the school committee closed both the upper and lower Alden schools in 1992, library trustees decided the town's library needs over at least the next 20 years could be better met in the upper Alden building.

"When we began, nobody heard of the Internet and nobody anticipated the growing demand for audio and video services," Lamothe said.

In 1993, when the project was first presented to town meeting, it was defeated when it fell 43 votes short of getting the required two-thirds margin.

"I felt that first go-round was just testing the waters," Bornheimer said.

Two years later, when the trustees and building committee went back to town meeting,

nearly 1,000 residents turned out to endorse the project by a vote of 768-104.

By that time, the cost to the town had been reduced from \$5 million to \$3 million.

That's because the trustees pledged to raise \$1 million through private donations, had received a federal grant of \$200,000 and were anticipating a state library construction grant of \$2.1 million.

The town meeting vote to authorize borrowing up to \$3 million for the project was contingent on receipt of the state grant, which was awarded a few months later.

"We went all over town and sold the project," Bornheimer said, noting that under the revised financial package taxpayers would have to pick up only 48 percent of the total cost of a new library.

As for the private fund-raising effort, "We've had an incredibly heartwarming response," Bornheimer said, with more than \$1.1 million already raised or pledged.

From the campus entrance, the first floor of the new library will include a periodicals reading room, the Bumpus Art Gallery, a children's section and, in the lower half of the former school gymnasium, fiction.

Reference, non-fiction and a teen-young adult section will be on the top floor.

The new Alden Library will have 39,900 square feet of space compared with 12,726 in the current building.

Bornheimer said the project is on schedule for completion by Sept. 25.

Lamothe said she can have the new facility open to the public two weeks later.

If so, there may be a series of grand opening activities throughout the Columbus Day weekend.